

TESTIMONY ON BILL 972 AN ACT PROTECTING MINORS FROM THE HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF TANNING DEVICES.

To the Chairs of the Environment Committee, Senator Andrea Stillman, Representative Betsy Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of Bill 972. My name is Lauren Hurd. I live in Hamden, Connecticut.

Tanning is big business. Revenue in this industry has increased five fold since 1992. Thirty million people in the U.S. tan every year. Seventy percent are females, ages 15 – 49. I was part of that statistic until age 22 when I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma. Those are not two words you expect to hear at 22. I am now 24 years old and it has been two and a half years since I was told I had the deadliest form of skin cancer.

We unfortunately live in a society where people are consumed by how they look and are willing to take drastic measures to achieve this level of “perfection.” Throughout college, I tanned regularly with my friends. To say that the effects were gratifying would be an understatement; I was addicted. The psychological effect this drug had on me and continues to have on countless other people creates an undeniable dependence. The sad reality is that I had no concern for the silent damage I was doing to my body. Although I am a smart girl, I chose to ignore warnings and made excuses for it along the way. As a direct result from my lack of concern, education and addiction, I got cancer.

Tanning is quite a manipulative industry – many of our older family members were probably manipulated in the same way with smoking. Not only is it irresponsible that minors are allowed unrestricted access to tanning beds, but the behavior is actually encouraged through advertising and pop culture. What an abomination! The way media portrays attractiveness and other subsequent derivatives of society are obviously issues out of our direct control. However, the ability to restrict access for these young, impressionable people who are undoubtedly facilitating damage to their overall health is right at our fingertips. Trusting young teenagers to make a conscientious, informed decision here is clearly not the way to go. As is the case with anything else potentially concerning, kids are easily influenced and need guidance. With the knowledge and power we have right now, how can afford not to give them the direction they so desperately need?

Now that we have a chance to protect minors from a terrible fate, I ask you: Would you allow your child to be exposed to asbestos or arsenic? How about radium or mustard gas? These seem like absurd questions, however an alarming number of today’s youth are regularly and deliberately exposing themselves to a carcinogen of equal propensity – ultraviolet rays.

In August of 2009, the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer published an important study stating that the ultraviolet light used in tanning beds is as carcinogenic as asbestos, radium, arsenic, cigarettes and mustard gas. A

committee made up of scientists from nine different countries reviewed more than 20 studies and concluded that the risk of melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer, increases 75 percent when people start using tanning beds before age 30. Tanning beds were moved into their highest cancer risk category, which is labeled "carcinogenic to humans." Just as Big Tobacco tried to convince people that smoking wasn't harmful when the link between cigarettes and lung cancer was yet to be established, the tanning industry tried to convince young women and men that using tanning beds in moderation could actually be healthy. It is likely that the tanning industry will continue to dismiss these medical studies in the same fashion. The facts remain that there is no such thing as a healthy tan.

This year, over 1 million Americans will be diagnosed with skin cancer, while 11,700 will die of it according to the American Cancer Society and the Skin Cancer Foundation. Yet it is one of the few cancers for which a preventative option really exists. We must do whatever we can to lower this tragic figure.

A lot of young people maintain the notion that they are somehow invincible. I was one and I discovered the hard way how wrong I was. With support from all the scientific proof available, we have the power to prevent others from making the same mistake. Connecticut needs to step up and do the right thing.